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A BRIEF EXAMINATION  
OF  
DR. HORNER'S REASONS FOR ADOPTING HOMŒOPATHY;  
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The attention of the public of this locality having been recently attracted by Dr. Horner (lately one of the Physicians of the Infirmary here,) to the fact of his having embraced the principles of Homœopathy, I have deemed it desirable to examine the circumstances under which this conversion has taken place, and, as far as can be ascertained, to enquire into the nature of the evidence which he brings forward to justify his change of opinion and practice. And here, at the outset, I wish it to be understood that I have no intention of calling in question Dr. Horner's motives, and that I shall, in the following remarks, limit myself to the consideration of his fitness, in his present frame of mind, to form a clear and competent judgment for himself on this question, to say nothing of his capacity to guide—as he aims at doing—the judgment of others. I would also state that I do not consider this a fitting time or opportunity to discuss the true merits or demerits of Homœopathy. That would open up a more extensive field of enquiry than I am inclined at present to occupy. I wish merely to point out from passages which occur in the pamphlet, which he has recently published, that Dr. Horner is out of his own mouth convicted of being at present so warped in judgment, so certain of his own infallibility,

and so illogical in the conclusions he arrives at, that he cannot be regarded so much in the light of a scientific reasoner, as in that of an enthusiastic partizan.

To enter at full length into all the contradictions, the hasty conclusions, and the sweeping deductions from narrow and unsatisfactory data, with which Dr. H.'s pamphlet abounds, would occupy more space and time than I care to expend; but for the sake of those who may be supposed not to have the same interest as myself in carefully perusing the work in question, I would beg leave to point out a few of these defects in reasoning and fairness of argument. Firstly, with reference to his conversion, Dr. H. frequently states, and no doubt believes, that he has been led to his present conviction solely by facts, and that the experience which he has had of Homœopathic medicines has convinced him, in spite of his inclination and former convictions, of the reality of their virtues. At page 35, he speaks of his testimony as being "solely based on experience." At page 28, he says that he "conducted a lengthened, practical, and impartial enquiry into the Homœopathic system of curing disease"—"and discarded as irrelevant to his purpose the refinements and subtleties of theories." And at page 9, he states that, after obtaining a thorough insight into the science from books, he "most stringently, zealously, and," he might add, "jealously, conducted his lengthened and practical enquiry." These expressions, together with the general account which he gives of his reasons for making the experiments which converted him, would certainly lead one to suppose that he commenced these experiments with a calm, clear, and unbiassed mind. But if his entire statement be carefully read, it will be evident that his conversion was at least half effected before—according to his own account—he had instituted a single experiment. At page 5, he says, "I confess that, it was not an unmixed, or a purely spontaneous and enlightened desire to search after

“truth, that first prompted my enquiry into this new system of “medicine. I was equally impelled thereto, not only by the “unsatisfactory, and ever-varying systems of the old school of “physic, but yet more so by the conviction, that positive evil is “inseparable from the old method of cure.” It is evident then, that, before he began his enquiry, he was biassed against “the old school of physic.” He commenced his investigation with a conviction of the “positive evil” of that system; and the unknown regions of Homœopathy must have appeared fair and promising to a mind which, from whatever “not unmixed” motives, was already discontented and dissatisfied. In this frame of mind he proceeded to study “all the best works on the subject.” He surrendered himself to his new teachers, and we need not therefore be surprised to find him say, a few pages further on (page 10), when speaking of “the facts and circumstances which enforced the conviction” of the truth of Homœopathy—that “no amount of mere reading, or study “of Homœopathic literature, could have brought such conviction—real and indisputable—to his mind.” Is it not evident then that he was in the fair way of embracing the tenets of of Homœopathy, before the commencement of his course of experiments? He was first discontented with the ordinary system of practice. He observed, he says, *the increasing popularity* of Homœopathy (page 8); he studied the best works on the subject; and this study brought an amount of conviction, which only waited for a few experiments to be rendered indisputable. Now, we all know that it is only the first step which costs anything. “He who begins has half finished his work” is a saying as old as Horace, and much older no doubt; and after conviction—though not “*such* conviction”—was brought to Dr. Horner’s mind, it is easy to see that he would afterwards be led a not-unwilling captive by the syren which had already charmed him.



I do not mean to say that we are not to study the views and theories of Homœopathic writers. Most professional men under fifty have, at some period of their lives, made themselves acquainted with the principles and standards of Homœopathy, to an extent which Dr. Horner would seem to have little idea of. Indeed he appears to consider that his own previous ignorance on this subject—little creditable to one who aspired to a leading position in his profession, in his own locality at all events—is shared by the great bulk of medical men; and it is amusing to notice the indignation with which he speaks of the strange prejudices and anomalous conduct of the profession (page 9, &c.) in persisting in this supposed ignorance, while at the very same time he gently bewails his own unhappy error in not having sooner become enlightened. This, however, is only one instance of the way, in which he insists on regarding things from his own point of view. I may, in passing, mention another. He continually speaks of Homœopathy as the *new* system of medicine, because I suppose it is *new to him*, though he has surely read enough about it now to know that it is older than the present century. To return, I say let every man make himself acquainted, if he please, with Homœopathic literature; but if he commence a series of experiments on the subject, let it be before he has formed a conviction of its truth.

Having thus pointed out that Dr. Horner has been considerably mistaken, on his own showing, as to the state of mind in which he made his investigations, I would beg leave to refer to another remarkable mental phenomenon, as exhibited in his pamphlet. Having practised one system of medicine all his life; and having, as I am told, distinguished himself by the vituperation which he heaped in conversation on an antagonistic system—regarding which, he now says, he was supremely ignorant—he, after reaching a mature age, is converted, partly by books, partly by experience,

to the very system of medicine which he had before vilified. Now, no one can blame him for this change of opinion *in itself*; still less for openly and candidly avowing it. But, would it not occur to most people that a man (who found, or supposed that he found, that he had during his whole past life been labouring under a vast delusion; and that his best years and the strongest energies of his mind had been devoted to the support of what he now believed to be a fallacy;) would be deeply humiliated by the discovery of his life-long mental blindness, and have learnt to speak with caution and circumspection of what he now believed to be the errors of others; and ought he not to have received so severe a lesson as to the delusions to which our poor human nature is subject, that he would hardly venture to speak dogmatically again? The probation, through which he has just passed, has, however, had quite the opposite effect on Dr. Horner. Had he worked hard all his life to establish some principle, the truth of which he had at length been enabled satisfactorily to demonstrate, he could not have spoken in a more contemptuous tone of those who had been his opponents, nor have advanced his opinions more dogmatically than he has done in the pages to which I am now referring. Of those remedies which he has spent all his professional life in prescribing, he speaks as “appliances which, *by destroying vital energy, paralyze “restorative power.”* He speaks of the rest of the profession in Hull and elsewhere, as blinded by prejudice and ignorance. At page 29, he speaks of Homœopathy “as not only in itself a positive “good, but also as an escape from the old practice which is environed with so much that is positive evil.” While this is the manner in which he characterizes that system which he has so long professed, it is remarkable to observe the tone of authority and the air of infallibility which he assumes when referring to the doctrines, whose acquaintance he has made only within the last few months. At page 29, he says—“My testimony is that “Homœopathy is indeed a great fact, a mighty truth.

“Such are the calm and fixed convictions which have  
 “been forced upon my own mind. Yet this is the stone  
 “which the very builders and teachers in the profession would  
 “refuse, the pearl which they would cast away, ‘though it is  
 “richer than all their tribe.’” And again, at page 34, “Sir J.  
 “Forbes, and the old school of physic, will *now* see,” after the  
 appearance of the Dr.’s pamphlet, “that their objections are  
 “but, like the fabric of a vision, baseless ; and baseless also are  
 “all other objections which they must *now* conjure up or sub-  
 “stitute. *For I have shown* to you that Homœopathy rests on  
 “the broad basis of truth.”

I would ask any unprejudiced person, whether this is the  
 sort of language to be used by a man, who has come forward to  
 convict himself of life-long error blindness and delusion.  
 Surely the lesson of humility, which his present situation should  
 teach, has been thrown away upon Dr. Horner.

I pass on to another peculiarity which strongly characterizes  
 his pamphlet, tending to diminish the weight of his evidence  
 in the eyes of thinking men. I mean the distorted views  
 which he takes of things, and the broad deductions which he  
 draws from narrow bases. For instance, at page 5, he speaks  
 of an evil “more insidious” than blood-letting, viz.: “the  
 “retention and deposition of drugs in the various parts,  
 “structures, and vital organs of the body.” He means, of  
 course, that these drugs given *for medicinal purposes* are so  
 retained and deposited. Yet the authority he refers to, in  
 support of his assertion, is the evidence of “Professor Christison,  
 Dr. Taylor, and others, on the occasion of a late criminal’s trial.”  
 Now, is it possible that the difference between the consequences  
 produced by drugs administered for the cure of disease and for  
 the purpose of slow poisoning, never entered Dr. Horner’s mind ?



or did he think that the evidence which applied to the one set of cases must necessarily apply to the other? or is his judgment so entirely warped that he is incapable of seeing that evidence, which is acquired from the practice of a secret poisoner, cannot apply *prima facie* to the practice of the intelligent physician?

He thinks (page 57) that Dickens, in his allusions to the circumlocution office, refers to the proceedings of the medical colleges! Is not this a proof that his mental vision is so jaundiced that he sees things, not as they are, but through his own distorted medium? and is it not fair to conclude that this distortion may extend to facts as well as to illustrations?

He goes on to say that he shall give "proof and examples, "where not only mineral but also vegetable drugs, as aloes, "colocynth, &c., which had been administered even some years "before, remained deposited in the system—a miserable and "wholly shattered state, both of mental and bodily health, being "the consequence; but where both were, eventually, happily "restored, by the removal of these latent (and these poisonous) "drugs." Now, any one would expect that to prove so remarkable a statement as this, and one, moreover, advanced with so much confidence, Dr. Horner would be prepared with an overwhelming amount of proof. He indeed asserts that "the facts" (so styled) "are incontrovertible." But what do the facts amount to? A quotation from Dr. Mac Leod, of Benrhydding—unsupported by either medical or chemical evidence. I should think that Dr. Mac Leod, whatever his individual opinion may be, would shrink from allowing his single unsupported testimony to be adduced as *proof* of so important an assertion. Dr. Horner would have us believe that mercury and aloes were extracted from patients who had years before taken these substances in medicinal doses. But, where is the chemical evidence of the presence of

these bodies? Dr. Mac Leod states what he supposes he observed, but in summing up his opinion, he says "it is not merely "that these medicines so derange the tissues, &c., but it is like- "wise *I believe* in consequence of the substances remaining in "the organs, &c." Yet Dr. Horner boldly estimates this belief of Dr. Mac Leod's as tantamount to a well ascertained fact, and considers it as demonstrative proof of the retention of even vegetable drugs administered years before. Such a system of reasoning places a man beyond the pale of logical argument.

But more extraordinary and more illogical than all, after this abuse of the ordinary rules of medicine; after the statement that Homœopathy is not only good in itself, but an escape from the positive evil of ordinary practice; after speaking of medical appliances as agents which "by destroying vital energy paralyze "restorative power;" Dr. Horner actually affirms his willingness to continue to use those agents. He says (page 56) "I shall" (in the event of being permitted to remain connected with the Infirmary) "make use of such medicines as I find in the Infirmary—"ary—make of course the best and most efficient use of them."

I have by no means exhausted, I have indeed merely touched on the defective arguments with which Dr. Horner's pamphlet abounds. I have, however, pointed out, that his change of opinion was half effected before he commenced his experiments; that no sooner was this change completed than—unabashed by finding himself in the position of having all his life been labouring under mistake and delusion, and depending on his own judgment as though that faculty had never deceived him—he at once assumes the tone of a teacher of others, and not content with proclaiming his own conviction and belief, talks of the ignorance and prejudice of those who are of a different way of thinking. Nay more; Dr. Horner—with no claim to more than a limited local

reputation as a physician—dares to vouch for the future creed of one of the greatest names in modern surgery, the late Mr. Liston. “Though Mr. Liston” he says “was not a Homœopathist, “he would doubtless soon have embraced this science, had his “life been spared, for he tried it in severe and urgent cases, and “*necessarily* so far as he did try it, found it true.” This statement, as usual, is given without a voucher ; and I have the best means of knowing, on the authority of the men who were most intimate with Mr. Liston, that Dr. Horner’s assertions regarding him are without foundation. But as the climax to his contradictions, I have further shown that Dr. Horner was, when he wrote his pamphlet, still prepared to practice within the walls of the Infirmary that system and those appliances, which he stigmatizes as uncertain, noxious, and prejudicial.

Dr. Horner enters (page 41) at some length on the subject of statistics ; and takes the unwarrantable liberty of quoting, as Dr. Routh’s own, a table, derived, and that inaccurately, from the statistics which that gentleman has collected, but *the disproof of the Homœopathic portion of which* is the main object of Dr. R.’s pamphlet. The statistical question being one connected with the claims of Homœopathy, hardly falls within the scope of my remarks, as I have limited my enquiry to the consideration of Dr. Horner’s fitness to guide public opinion on this question. But I may simply remark that it has undergone a strict and searching examination, and that even Dr. Henderson (who alone, of all the Homœopathic physicians in this country, has any pretensions to a general scientific reputation) admits the Homœopathic version to be unfair and inexcusable.

It may however be said, and indeed is said by the public, How are Dr. Horner’s cases as related by him to be explained without admitting the efficacy of his mode of treatment ? And here a

great difficulty meets us at the outset. I ask any one to look over these alleged cures; to bear in mind the facility with which a man, whose whole thoughts are absorbed in one idea, gives himself up to self-deception; and then to say what value can be attached to cases, which are to be taken on the "ipse dixit" of the narrator. It is true, that in one instance the name of a lady Homœopathically treated is given; but from the position in life of the party, that does not help us much, as no one likes a battle to be fought over the body of a friend. I shall only remark, with regard to this case, that I have the authority of the physician who was called in before Dr. Horner, for saying that he never pronounced that there was no hope of recovery. Another case is given at page 25, so circumstantially that I believe there is little doubt as to its individuality. In reference to it I shall only say that "the enlightened surgeon in attendance" states that the ordinary treatment was never suspended. The most of the other cases are Dr. Horner's own; and that state of mind which enables him to foresee the futurity of Mr. Liston's conduct, might not improbably, though quite unconsciously, have helped him to discover the happy effects which he so highly extols.

There is, however, one set of cases where Dr. Horner can be met on equal ground. He himself furnishes us with a test by which to try his own accuracy. He says (page 11) "In every more important and interesting case, careful notes were kept. All the symptoms of the disease were primarily registered; and the effect of every medicine that was administered, and every change of symptom, noted." Among the examples of cases "so treated" are three which occurred within the walls of the Infirmary. It is well known, that in such institutions books are kept, in which the changes which take place in each individual patient should be carefully noted down. Dr. Horner therefore had here a machinery made to his hand, by means of which the



progress of his cases could be ascertained, not only by himself but by every one connected with the Infirmary. These books are provided at the expense of the Infirmary and belong, in my judgment, to that institution. In them, therefore, without intruding on the details of private practice, might the effects of Dr. Horner's treatment be traced; and accordingly to these books we have a right to look, as the source from which unimpeachable information might be obtained. But I am informed that these books are not forthcoming, that in fact they have been removed by Dr. Horner. The cases as related in Dr. Horner's pamphlet are too vague to avail anything in a scientific enquiry. Hundreds of cases apparently as strong can be brought forward by every herb doctor, and by every male and female quack in the town. Without their details, cases are of no medical value whatever. The books ought at once to be restored to the Institution; and until they are restored, Dr. Horner subjects himself to the suspicion of having taken less pains to verify his cases than he would have the public believe. Dr. Horner knows well the magnitude of the stake at issue. He says, "I felt that the investigation, in which I was now engaged, was, perhaps, the most serious act of my life. Not only my reputation as a physician, my honour as a man, and the relief of the afflicted, but yet more—the interest of truth itself were equally involved." (Page 11). The production of these books is necessary to prove that he really did take the stringent measures to avoid error which he says he did; that he did carefully register the primary condition of the patients, and note the effect of medicine and the change of symptoms; and that he did not—while his mind was heated by controversial fervour—trust to his memory for that which should have been placed beyond the possibility of doubt or cavil. Dr. Horner ought not to have allowed the shadow of a suspicion to have rested on a matter of such vital importance. But that is not all; the house surgeon of the Infirmary (who,



if any one, ought to know the truth) has been heard to affirm that these notes never were thus carefully taken; that Dr. Horner trusted almost entirely to memory in getting up these cases for his pamphlet; and that not only was no regular and proper register kept, but that no regular system of Homœopathic treatment was ever adopted. For the truth of this statement, I cannot vouch. The restoration of the books, supposing them to be properly kept, would at once set the matter at rest. Till this is done, it is impossible to approach Dr. Horner's cases in the language and with the spirit of scientific enquiry.